

Gardening Together

What's one of the best ways to help your child learn where foods come from? Of course, grow your own! Gardening shows your child how plants grow from seeds and what seeds need to mature into healthy plants. Here are some simple gardening activities children can help with and learn from.



GROW A CONTAINER GARDEN

Ready to dig into the soil? If you lack space for an outdoor garden, you and your child can have a small "container garden" on your back porch or city terrace. Leaf lettuce, radishes, and shorter varieties of tomatoes and carrots can all be grown in pots. Here's how:

■ **Cover the drainage hole** in the bottom of the pot with a flat stone. That keeps the soil from trickling out.

■ **Fill the container with soil** almost to the top. For best results, use potting soil from a nursery or variety store.

■ **Dig holes for the seeds.** Check the seed packet to see how deep to dig. (Save the seed packet. You'll need information on it once it's time to thin the young plants.)

■ **Place a seed** in each hole. Gently pat the soil over each seed.

■ **Water lightly** with a fine mist. The soil should be moist, not soaked.

■ **Check the seed packet** for the amount of sun the plants need.

■ **Depending on the kind of seeds,** they may take from 3 to 17 days to sprout. Once they do, pull out plants that are too close together, to give the remaining plants more root space.

■ **Remember that plants in containers** depend on you for water and food (fertilizer). Keep the soil moist.

FEEDING YOUR GARDEN

Show your child how old food can be recycled to create new food for new plants by starting a compost pile that can "feed" your garden.

■ **You'll need a leakproof** container with a lid, such as a small garbage pail. Food scraps except meat, bones, and grease can go in the compost pile. Drain off any liquid, then add the scraps to the container and top with a thin layer of soil. You can also add decaying leaves to the pile. Add more layers of food and soil each day until the compost pile is about four inches deep. (Keep the lid on to keep animal scavengers away.) Now just stir the food-soil mixture daily and mist with water to keep it damp.

■ **After about a month,** your composted matter will be ready to fertilize your garden.

BOOKS ABOUT PLANTING

Two great books for curious young gardeners that describe the journey of food from seed to plate are *Where Food Comes From* by David Suzuki and Barbara Hehner (John Wiley & Sons) and *Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Elbert (Scholastic).